

MALE ABUSE VICTIMS SUFFER FROM CRIME AND STEREOTYPES

By Wendy Murphy

Abington fifth grade teacher Christine McCallum last week joined an ugly list of female teachers with a thing for little boys.

Gender aside, there's something scary about the idea that a person can achieve a masters degree in education, make it through the hiring process, successfully educate kids for a while, have parents say things like "what a great teacher", and then one day - boom - she's an alleged rapist who took advantage of a motherless 12 year-old boy and had her way with him 300 times in 18 months!

I can already guess what the defense will be: "She's sick. She couldn't help it -- it's a compulsion". Yeah, sure. So is the urge to use the bathroom - but defendant McCallum managed not to pull her pants down and relieve herself in the middle of Main Street. Spare me.

And if I may offer up a prayer to the gods of justice: please save us from the nonsensical "she's not the type" defense.

The truth is -- people who look nice on the outside are just as capable of doing dastardly things as the toothless homeless guy living in a box by the river. In fact, I'd go further and suggest that the pretty people can be even more dangerous because they can afford the cover of a good job and a white picket fence.

Like most parents, I relish the myth that blonde female fifth grade teachers aren't dangerous. It helps me feel good about sending little Johnny off to school every day.

But feel-good cultural pabulum distorts the disturbing facts:

According to the Department of Justice, females account for 6000 sexual offenses each year. 1.6 million men and 1.5 million women were sexually abused by women when they were children. The majority of female offenders are between 22 and 33 years old and are not mentally ill. They are typically employed in professional jobs or as managers and a high percentage of their victims are "close" contacts, such as students, family friends and children they advised in some fashion.

When they offend against boys, we either ignore or discount the harm because it seems impossible for a boy's parts to get, um, tingly if he's truly being harmed. Truth is, boys suffer terribly, even when their parts are tingling. But because we high-five them as "lucky", they aren't free to talk about the experience as painful. This silencing adds to the psychic pain for male victims and so long as we continue to view male sexual abuse through the prism of an orgasm, it will continue.

If we really care about boys, we need to mind the research that shows how they suffer as men. As adults, male victims often suffer from PTSD, drug and alcohol addiction,

failed intimate relationships, etc., and they don't heal easily because they have to find a way to connect the dots between adult symptoms and long since-ceased abuse.

If we did a better job understanding the harm when it happens, things would improve overnight. One way to get there is to stop thinking about male sex abuse as "good" because of the tingles. Let's think about it, instead, the way we think about the excitement boys feel when they drink beer underage and then drive around in fast cars. They may find the experience tingly, but it doesn't mean we should cheer them on - and it sure as hell doesn't mean drinking and driving fast is "good" for them.

That defendant McCallum was ordered to post only \$1,000.00 cash bail and faces no mandatory prison time is proof that our legal system is part of the problem. And our schools have to step up to the plate, too.

Kids will never be safe from predatory teachers unless schools do at least three things:

1. Screen applicants with a good psychological tool to ferret out those with personality disorders.
2. Adopt clear guidelines such that boundary violations are recognized as warning signs.
3. Enforce guidelines with mandatory sanctions so that risk factors lead to swift termination.

If prevention is the goal, these things are important because the flames of teacher sexual abuse are typically preceded by the smoke of boundary violations.

The school system's failure to recognize the risk factors in McCallum's case rightly makes all parents very nervous about seemingly great teachers.

Does this mean we should we stop assuming that schools are safe?

I don't know.

But I'm certain that if we blindly trust the system, we might be 300 rapes too late for little Johnny.